

What to do in the wake of a damaged brand

 By [Chemory Gunko](#)

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If nothing else, the Oscar Pistorius, Lance Armstrong and Tiger Woods debacles have shown us just how quick, and sudden, even a strong brand's fall from grace can be.

While most of us will never have to deal with anything quite as severe as the events of the past week, it does not mean that your brand will not have its own hiccoughs that could be severe enough to temporarily derail, or even permanently close down, your business.

So, just what do you do when the proverbial hits the fan, and your company and income are put at risk?

An ounce of prevention

A key element of any marcomms strategy should be a Crisis Communications Plan.

As I wrote the sentence, I could already hear the chorus of excuses that invariably follow a statement like that: 'We're too small,' 'We can't afford it,' and 'Something like that would never happen to us.'

In all three cases, you are wrong.

It is impossible to predict the future, and additionally you have no control over individuals' actions.

Knowing what to do, because you have a plan in place to cater for this kind of eventuality, can make the difference between your brand - and business - collapsing or thriving.

At the bare minimum, each member of your staff should know what to say in the case of an emergency - even if it is only 'No comment.'

In addition, everyone should also know who your media spokesperson is, and that spokesperson should have had basic media training so that they know how to answer posed questions properly, and most importantly, will not be overwhelmed by the attention and questions and lights.

The key here is to understand that, if handled well, a few well-placed interviews in the beginning can really avoid an avalanche of trouble going forward.

Stop! Collaborate, listen

So, if everything does blow up in your face, and you don't have a Crisis Communication Strategy in place, the first thing you need to do is call in the experts.

As the adage goes: A man who is his own lawyer has a fool for a client. The same rings true in crisis communications.

In the midst of a crisis, you are overwhelmed, usually emotional, and highly attached to the outcome of the situation playing out in front of you. This makes it very hard to be objective and make logical decisions.

An impartial expert will not only know what to do immediately, but also has the benefit of impartiality, and so can see the situation for what it is - and make the tough decisions when they need to be made.

Once you've called the experts in, you need to formulate a game plan

You need to assess the situation and craft a statement & response so that you know exactly what to say when you are cornered by reporters with questions.

Again, your main aim here is to defuse the tension as quickly as possible, and well-crafted responses have the power to do exactly that.

In addition, a good crisis communications team will have a rolodex full of press contacts, and be in a better position to ensure that your message and responses are properly represented in the media, and given equal coverage to any negative reporting around the situation.

Apologise...

If you, or your company, are in the wrong, then the course of action to consider seriously is an apology.

Over the course of history, many an argument has been defused by a well-placed and sincere apology.

...and make amends

Saying sorry, on its own, however, is often not enough though.

So, take a positive action to make amends. This could take many forms, from a well-thought out donation to an appropriate charity to a change in governance policy.

The key thing here is that you obtain coverage for both the apology and the steps you have taken to make amends. It is not the end of the world when a crisis hits you, even if it does feel like it. This too shall pass, and if you handle it brilliantly, you have the opportunity to turn everyone watching you into raving fans.

ABOUT CHEMORY GUNKO

Chemory Gunko is a seasoned Creative Director, a certified NLP Practitioner, Ericksonian Hypnotherapy Practitioner, Energy ReSourcing Practitioner & Life Coach, among others. She works as a marketing consultant and provides copywriting, SEO, graphic design and Joomla! website services.

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